

FACT SHEET: The CIA, Crack, and Our Communities

1. There is credible evidence that drug smuggling has become a known by-product of every significant covert operation -- from Burma and Laos to Afghanistan and Central America.
2. According to declassified White House memorandum and E-mail messages, CIA and other U.S. officials knew about drug trafficking, collaborated with, protected and in some cases even paid known drug traffickers who were deemed important players in the covert war against Nicaragua during the 1980s.
3. The U.S. Senate's 1989 Report of the Subcommittee on Narcotics, Terrorism, and International Operations found an array of "Contra drug links," including: "involvement in narcotics trafficking by individuals associated with the Contra movement;" "business relationships" between narcotics traffickers and Contra organizations; "cash, weapons, planes, pilots, air supply services and other materials" given by drug traffickers to the Contra operation; and "payments to drug traffickers by the U.S. State Department of funds authorized by the Congress for humanitarian assistance to the Contras...". Regarding Col. Oliver North's illegal Contra support operation, the Report concluded that "senior U.S. officials were not immune to the idea that drug money was the perfect solution to the Contras' funding problems."
4. In a special 1982 report, U.S. Attorney General William French Smith stated that cocaine imports to the U.S. had jumped to 44 tons in 1980, a 57% increase in just one year. Between 1982 and 1985, the number of cocaine users in the U.S. rose by 38%, and by 1985, crack cocaine-use had become an epidemic in inner-cities.
5. With cocaine pouring into U.S. cities during the past 15 years, criminal penalties for cocaine-and other drug-related offenses have increased sharply and the prison population has tripled.
6. In 1985, the federal penalty for possession of crack cocaine was made 100 times higher than the penalty for the same amount of powder cocaine, although the substances are virtually identical in their pharmacological nature and addictive effect.
7. Seventy-five percent of powder cocaine-users and 52% of crack cocaine-users are white. However, African-American and Latino crack-users are four times more likely to be arrested and incarcerated than are whites who use crack, according to the Sentencing Project, a Washington-based research firm. As a result of this discrepancy, African-Americans and Latinos constitute 90% of those jailed for drug possession, although they make up only 23% of the population and represent a smaller percentage of cocaine-users than whites.
8. Over the past 30 years, government studies by the Johnson (1967), Ford (1978), and Bush (1992) administrations could not demonstrate that increased incarceration deters drug-related street crime. Despite the failure of the "war on drugs," however, federal, state, and local governments continue to pass stiffer penalties for drug offenses and increase spending for expanded prison construction, while cutting spending on health care, education, job training, and other community services.

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